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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001601

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: PALACE SUPPORTS MEDIATION, DOES NOT COMPLETELY
RULE OUT INTERVENTION

REF: A. BANGKOK 1546

[1B.](#) BANGKOK 1475

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: The Palace is trying to undo the furor caused by the broadcast Sunday night of the King's intervention following the violence that resulted from the 1992 democracy protests. Although the Palace meant only to encourage peace and negotiation, they are dismayed to find that both sides have seized on the broadcast to buttress their own intractable positions. The King's Principal Private Secretary told the Ambassador during a meeting on Wednesday that the King was not yet ready to intervene in the political confrontation. We are left with the impression that the Palace still strongly supports a negotiated solution. However, if the elections were unsuccessful, the King might be prepared to use his constitutional authority to resolve the deadlock. End summary.

[12.](#) (C) The Ambassador met today with Arsa Sarasin, the King's Principal Private Secretary. Yesterday, we had requested a meeting to discuss the upcoming celebrations for the King's birthday in June, expecting to be put off in light of the tense political situation. To our surprise, Arsa proposed a meeting today. Arsa admitted that the Sunday evening broadcast of the iconic film of the King's intervention following the 1992 pro-democracy demonstrations had provoked a wave of conspiracy theorizing (ref A). Arsa claimed that the King himself had wanted the film broadcast to emphasize the need for peace and reconciliation. Following the broadcast, however, both sides seized on the film to justify their positions. The confusion was compounded because no one knew who had authorized or encouraged the TV stations to show the footage. The PM and the government denied any role.

THE KING IS NOT READY ... YET

[13.](#) (C) Arsa expressed his concern that both sides were exploiting the broadcast. On Tuesday, he had scrambled to issue a press statement to distance the Palace from all of this. First, they issued a statement saying that the Palace had had nothing to do with the Sunday evening broadcast. However, they quickly realized that this could provoke yet another unintended reaction, since it would cause people to believe that the government had done it and was now covering it up. Arsa further assessed that the broadcast had been beneficial overall, having a 'cooling effect' on the protesters and on the situation in general. Therefore, his office followed up with a second statement almost immediately. That statement noted that as film was "public

information" the media could re-broadcast it on their own, providing they did so responsibly. Thus Arsa had tried to extricate the Palace from the political storm.

¶4. (C) From this, Arsa went on to discuss the situation overall. He agreed with our assessment that both sides still thought they were winning. Arsa described both sides as "implacable." Both were trying to force the King to come down into the political arena. Arsa said that the King was just not ready to do this -- yet. He emphasized that the King had to respect the Constitution. Arsa said that if the PM and his cabinet cannot conduct the business of government, then there might be an argument for the King to "intervene" under Constitution Article 7 to resolve a deadlock. He also raised the prospect of bringing in some neutral mediator to attempt a resolution. Arsa suggested a team of distinguished university rectors (an idea that has been circulating in some circles.) Arsa expressed his personal unhappiness at being dragged in to the middle of the contretemps. He indignantly denied a rumor circulating that he was secretly a Thaksin supporter, and that he owned shares in Shin Corp.

THE KING AND HIM

¶5. (C) The Ambassador asked about the relationship between PM Thaksin and the King. There has been much speculation about this question. In general, it is presumed that the King does not like Thaksin, but the Palace has been very discreet about its views. Arsa answered that the relationship between the King and Thaksin is "correct." The PM gets an audience with the King whenever he wants one. Lately, however, the King "only listens," he doesn't say anything because "he's afraid that Thaksin will quote him." The Ambassador asked about the allegation that Thaksin has

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been less respectful of the King than previous prime ministers. Arsa said that the PM behaves in a respectful way, and that it seems the PM wants to be sincere. However, Thaksin is disrespectful generally to anyone else who disagrees with him.

¶6. (C) As the Ambassador left, he spoke to Tej Bunnag, Arsa's assistant (and, like Arsa, former Ambassador to the U.S.). Tej pointed out that the press was also carrying reports of yesterday's Privy Council meeting. "One of them" had leaked the news that the Privy Council had discussed the current situation, leading to more speculation that the Palace was considering intervening. Tej emphasized that this had been a regularly-scheduled meeting and did not signify any change in the Palace's position. The Ambassador raised the question of how an intervention by the King would actually be perceived by the public. Tej agreed that, despite Thaksin's popularity in the countryside, if the King did somehow remove him, this would be accepted by the population.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The brouhaha around the broadcast on Sunday night exemplifies the King's dilemma. Anything he says or does is intensely scrutinized and subject to manipulation by the antagonists in the debate. We were struck by the relative ease with which these two people close to the King entertained the idea of a royal intervention under Article 7, something the Palace has been most reticent about discussing previously. We came away with the impression that, if the elections were unsuccessful due to the inability of enough candidates to meet the 20 percent threshold (ref B) or some other reason, then this might be an acceptable opening for the King to use his constitutional authority to resolve the crisis. However, the King and those around him vastly prefer a mediated settlement between the opposing parties, and they will likely continue to use their influence as far as

possible to bring that about. Exactly what kind of mediated settlement is possible between two such "implacably" opposed sides, however, is still not apparent. A royal intervention could happen, but not at this time.

BOYCE